

First record of Streaky-breasted Flufftail *Sarothrura boehmi* for Benin

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Première mention du Râle de Böhm *Sarothrura boehmi* pour le Bénin. Les 5 et 6 septembre 2009, une femelle et deux juvéniles du Râle de Böhm *Sarothrura boehmi* ont été observés dans des champs de riz à la périphérie de Cobly, au nord-ouest du Bénin (10°28'N 01°01'E). Le chant a pu être enregistré. Ceci constitue la première donnée pour le Bénin.

On 5–6 September 2009, we paid early-morning visits to the north-eastern outskirts of Cobly, in north-west Benin (10°28'N 01°01'E). While standing on a bridge over a seasonally swollen stream feeding adjacent rice fields, we heard, on both days, between 07.30 and 08.00 hrs, a distinctive call coming from the nearest rice paddy and a more distant field. It comprised a series of 10–40 low *whoo* notes, initially slightly rising, then, after the tenth note, remaining constant in volume and pace, with *c.*2 seconds between each *whoo*, and terminating in a few less regularly uttered notes. Our sound-recording proved to be virtually identical to that of male Streaky-breasted Flufftail *Sarothrura boehmi* on Chappuis (2000).

On the first day, after hearing the vocalisation, we observed a small rail flying with dangling legs from the rice paddy *c.*4 m from us and landing *c.*3 m away. It was nicely lit by the morning sun: the upper wings and short body were entirely dark brown with pale mottling and streaking, and the legs were dull greenish-yellow. On 6 September, we observed the bird again under comparable conditions, but this time it was joined by two similar but sooty-grey birds, which flew up from a nearby spot. The appearance of these three birds fits the description of, respectively, female and juvenile Streaky-breasted Flufftails (Borrow & Demey 2001).

The female Red-chested Flufftail *S. rufa*, the only other flufftail in West Africa (east to Nigeria) which frequents similar habitat, is noticeably paler, whereas juvenile White-spotted Flufftail *S. pulchra* is considerably browner than the two juveniles we observed (Borrow & Demey 2001). African Crake *Crex egregia* and Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostris* are larger and possess different plumage features and jizz.

We heard male Streaky-breasted Flufftails on two further occasions: on 20 September 2009 at Didani, *c.*4 km west of Cobly, and on 8 August 2009 at Landa-Pozanda (09°31'N 01°17'E), in neighbouring Togo, where the species has not yet been recorded (Cheke & Walsh 1996). Both sites comprised partially flooded wooded savannah near streams. On neither occasion were we able to get close enough to see the birds or record their vocalisations.

The distribution of Streaky-breasted Flufftail is imperfectly known. This secretive species is considered to be an intra-African migrant over most of its range and is known to breed during the rains at scattered localities, from south-east Congo-Kinshasa and Kenya to Zimbabwe (Taylor & van Perlo 1998). It is very rarely recorded in West Africa, with only two records from Nigeria, one off the coast of Guinea and an unsubstantiated sight record in Mali (Urban *et al.* 1986, de Bont 2001, Borrow & Demey 2001). Our record is thus the first for Benin, and it seems that the species also occurs in neighbouring Togo, although confirmation is preferably needed. The presence of two juveniles in early September suggests that egg laying occurred in June or July, during the rainy season, and it seems that Streaky-breasted Flufftail also breeds in West Africa.

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